



## The Secret Shopper Unwrapped

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Christmas is coming, and while the bells are ringing, the tills aren't. But Sandie - the rising star of the retail spying world - is busier than ever, rooting out the best and worst in festive customer care through her company. The former Charlie's Shopping Angels are helping out, too. Glamorous widow Grazia is going undercover under the duvet at boutique hotels, in between dating a succession of toyboys and trying to remember which lie she's told about her age. Meanwhile, not-quite-yummy mummy Emily investigates the child-friendliness of the high street with the help of three-year-old Freddie, when she's not working flat out with her partner to save their fledgling village shop from the un-festive credit crunch. The shoppers are back, but is the happiness they've worked so hard for, about to disappear faster than a Louis Vuitton handbag in the Harrod's sale?

## **The Secret Shopper Unwrapped Details**

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Author : Kate Harrison

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## From Reader Review The Secret Shopper Unwrapped for online ebook

### Ellie says

I haven't read The Secret Shopper's Revenge and I get the feeling this book is one more enjoyed when you already know the characters. I found Emily a highly unlikeable person and felt a bit like Grazia's story was filler. However I did like the Sandie/Kelly stories that intertwined and it would have worked if the other 2 characters were just 'supporting' that rather than having their own plots.

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### Chloe says

Emily, Sandie and Grazia are back! The Secret Shopping angels are still shopping, but this time they've got the Christmas season to contend with. Emily is happily living with Will and her son Freddie in their shop, but with the recession times are tough and Emily isn't sure the shop can survive, never mind her relationship with Will.

Sandie is now running her own Secret Shopping business and living with boyfriend Tom but there's something nagging Sandie in the back of her mind and soon that something is about to become crystal clear.

Finally, widow Grazia has decided its time to move on with her life and to get herself a man but is convinced her age is holding her back. With the season of goodwill and joy upon them, will the 3 women get their happy endings?

I first read Kate Harrison's first book with these characters, The Secret Shopper's Revenge, last year when it was first released and I loved it. The characters were great, it showed a good side of an industry we are all involved in one way or another but it was just a really good read as well. When I found out that Kate was writing another Secret Shopping book I was delighted, and luckily for me the publishers Orion sent me a copy to review for this site, and I started it almost the moment it dropped through my letterbox! The official cover is gorgeously festive with its red and silver ribbons and stars, and it certainly is the perfect book to read in the run up to Christmas (which has apparently already started in Tesco and Sainsburys!).

The book picks up a while after the original book, but with the same 3 women leading our story. Emily is again the most prominent of the three, but this was great for me as she is my favourite character of the books! Emily has found love with the lovely Will, who is just the nicest man in the world! Their storyline is so lovely, it makes you feel all warm but things do come back to earth with a bump for Emily in this book. Still, Harrison manages to keep the essence of Emily while slowly changing her and I enjoyed her development. Sandie is much more likeable in this book as she struggles with her own dilemmas, and I found her much nicer! She appears quite a bit in this book and is the opposite of Emily, but it works and the friendship between the women is genuine and a joy to read.

One story I really enjoyed in this book was Grazia. She has decided to start dating again, and I think the way Harrison has approached this in the book is touching and very realistic. I found the story very uplifting and sweet to read, and I really warmed to Grazia because of it. There is a new character in this book as well which I felt added a new dimension to the book, and her name is Kelly. She's a young girl who ends up working for Sandie and I think her story was very good and tied in well with the more mature women in the

book. I felt very sorry for Kelly, but I think Harrison has done a good thing by including her story in the book, and it also shows us the development of Sandie from the first book and how things change. I liked the addition of a new character, and felt she worked perfectly in the book.

There's plenty of mentions of Christmas throughout the book, and I very much enjoyed these. There is little paragraphs counting down to Christmas at the start of each chapter and these were often funny as they were written as guidelines for stores at Christmastime! There were some laugh out loud moments in the book, such as Emily visiting Santa's Grotto with Freddie in tow on a SS mission, and other things with Emily, but I felt the Christmas spirit was very alive in this book and Kate Harrison has captured the essence of what Christmas is really about to people, as well as the more commercialised side of it as well, and they both blend well to create a well balanced and enjoyable book!

I can imagine this would be a wonderful book to sit and read in the cold December months when your Christmas tree is up, your fire is on and you're all cosy in your house as it is one of those books you will want to sit and devour in the cold evenings. The characters are fantastically written, they're realistic and they are character you can grow to love and care about. Their journeys in this book are all very different, but they all come together to help each other through the good and bad, and that's what you want to read about – something to make you smile. I enjoyed every page of this with its subtle twists and turns along the way to keep you wanting more, and I found it so easy to slip back in with Emily, Sandie and Grazia again, probably because of the easy to read writing style and excellent plot. If you enjoyed The Secret Shopper's Revenge, you'll love this second outing with the secret shoppers, but if you haven't, pick this up anyway as a brilliant read!

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### **Tara Anderton says**

Hmmm just couldn't get into this one. The cover was promising, but the inside tells a different story. Apparently this is the second book in a series? The characters were hard to fall in love with, and the story line had me constantly saying 'who gives a shit!' It was really boring if I'm honest. I got about halfway through and had to stop reading. I usually give the author the benefit of the doubt that it will get better, but this just didn't.

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### **Shelleystrae at Book'd Out says**

I remember that I enjoyed The Secret Shopper's Revenge so I picked this up when it became available at the library. I think it probably helps to have the background of the previous novel but it isn't essential. This sequel is far less about the mystery shopping and more about the personal lives of the three friends Emily, Sandy and Grazia.

Emily is playing happy families with boyfriend Will but their dream shop is more like a nightmare. Emily's bubble threatens to burst under the financial pressure and her nasty ex husband doesn't help matters any. Though she is a bit of a flake, she is sweet and I was hoping things turned out okay for her.

Grazia is struggling with her fading looks but toyboy Nigel is doing his best to assure her that she is as beautiful as ever. While it's a shallow concern, the storyline carefully considers the emotions Grazia is confronting though I felt that Grazia was the weaker of the characters in this story.

Sandie has built up her own mystery shopping business and is happily living with Tom. However when her mother appears things begin to fall apart both personally and professionally.

Kelly needs a second chance and Sandie offers it to her, for the first time she has the possibility of something more in her life, until her father threatens to ruin everything.

While I find all of the protagonists likeable for different reasons, I felt it was Sandie and Kelly's stories that were the most interesting. Harrison sensitively explores issues like unexpected pregnancy, sexual violence and abandonment that is unexpected given the lighter tone of the previous novel. Sandie and Kelly's characters are the center of these rather dark themes and they are handled with an authenticity that is absorbing.

The Secret Shopper is a contemporary novel with an engaging cast and interesting story. I look forward to the third due for release in 2011

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### **Nicole says**

Emily, Sandie and Grazia are back for some more shopping! But not just any shopping, Christmas shopping! The three shoppers are back for some more fun, but it turns out to be that they're falling into problems. Sandie falls pregnant with her boyfriend Toby, which is against what her Grandma taught her, and her mother comes back after not wanting to know anything about her for years. Emily and Will have fallen in financial problems with the shop and Duncan comes back after being sacked. Grazia wants to live on the wild side after the death of her husband, Leon, and finds herself a toyboy (she finds 3 toyboys through the course of the book) but feels uncomfortable in her own skin and considers having surgery. But someone new has joined them. Kelly Wright, a girl that lives for her father. She finds herself working for Sandie after not finding much luck at the stall. Her father comes in contact with Charlie, Sandie's old employer whom she stole the secret shopping business from, and he gives her a choice. Either he makes her dad's life a living hell, or he saves him in return for Sandie's address and codes. This twist in the climax is something that I didn't expect to happen, but something I didn't like was that at this point there was too much going on and each chapter is written from a different character's point of view, so it gets a bit confusing. By Christmas, Sandie still can't decide what to do about the baby and whether to tell Toby or not. Also, she is trying to make amends with her mother and get along with Toby's mother. Emily has given in to Duncan taking Freddie for Christmas but this results in her and Will having a big row so she spends Christmas alone. Grazia however, seems to be having a wonderful time with her third toyboy, Nigel, and his family. Kelly still can't get over the decision she made and revisits her past in a horrifying way and tries to save Sandie's flat from burning (the result of Charlie Flack's doings). The book ends happily though, Emily is reunited with Will and Freddie. Sandie tells Toby and decides to keep the baby (after his mother tried to bribe her out of it). Grazia tells Nigel how she really feels about her skin and he talks her out of it. Kelly, with the help of a friend, begins to enjoy herself for once and has tried to forget about her past.

I really enjoyed this book. It had much more drama than the first book and made me want to read on. I would really like to see a sequel come out because there were many questions that were left unanswered by the end like did Sandie find out why that happened? Is Kelly going to go back to work for her in the New Year? Will Toby's mother interfere again with Sandie and her grandchild? Will Emily and Will make it through? Will Sandie find out who her father really is? On a whole I really enjoyed this and I read it at an appropriate time!

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### **Emmalg says**

I was drawn to this book in the library by the festive cover (it's mid-November) and rapidly discovered how

few days are left for doing my Christmas shopping. If nothing else I have to give the book points for giving me a kick!

I didn't love this book, it was merely okay. I didn't like the style but it worked. The characters are quite well written but it seems to be a book about nothing. Nevertheless, I found myself reading it throughout the night. I think I wanted to see what Sandie would do although in this type of book it was pretty much a foregone conclusion.

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### **Chrissi says**

This book was enjoyable enough and easy to read but I didn't think it had much substance to it. I know, I know, it's chick lit- but some chick lits are brilliantly written and are much more than fluff, which unfortunately this wasn't.

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### **CuteBadger says**

I picked this up in a charity shop where it was part of their display of Christmas-themed books, and it was just right to read in the run-up to the festive season. It's light, though it does deal with some dark themes, and is a quick read.

I haven't read the first book in the Secret Shopper series, and I think I would have enjoyed this book more had I had a knowledge of the characters and their backgrounds.

All in all a pleasant, light, but forgettable read.

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### **Rosie Ellen says**

A slightly frothy read but good fun none-the-less. Apparently the second book to feature these characters, but I didn't feel like I was missing any back story when reading it. Based around the lives of 3 secret shoppers, it wasn't very challenging to read but the characters were interesting enough that it was still enjoyable enough. The fact that it only took me a day to finish shows just how easy it was, but also that I was involved enough to carry on with it. A pleasant enough holiday read.

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### **Angela says**

Enjoyed the book. I thought after the first book the second would have an entirely new cast of characters. I'm glad to have been wrong although there were a few new additions to the story such as Marnie, Al, and it looks like we've met the mysterious Charlie from the first book. Fully intend to read the next book.

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## **Kathlyn says**

Typical chic lit...

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## **Sharon Williams says**

Really enjoyed reading this and following the lives of the 3 main characters. There were some very funny laugh out loud moments including toyboys, botox, and large stuffed bears I will read the others in the series.

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## **Katrina Walper says**

This book was good, but it didn't give me that feel good Christmas spirit that I was looking for. I also did not read the other books in this series and so found it a bit harder to get into the characters. Just as a heads up this book is also written from each character's point of view, which can sometimes prevent you from becoming attached with one of the characters.

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## **Marianne says**

I made the choice to pick this up after deciding to read some basic chick-lit that didn't require too much thought and as it's getting into the Christmas season this seemed like a decent enough choice. I didn't read the first book in the series but I didn't feel like it was particularly necessary to have done so to be honest as little bits and pieces are filled in and the story is pretty self contained. The story centres around a group of women who are friends and work together and the dramas in their own individual lives in the lead up to Christmas.

The characterisation was good and even without the character headings it would have been pretty obvious whose pov we were reading anyway but the individual characters had much differing degrees of likeability. I found Emily for example to be a whiney, self-centred, spoiled brat at times and it was hard for me not to be silently screaming for Will to leave her permanently when he left. Likewise I found Kelly and her struggles between good and evil (so to speak) would have meant more if I had liked her to begin with. Grazia had a dalliance with botox and a toyboy but I found her storyline pretty engrossing and my own personal favourite was the storyline with Sandie who was struggling whether to have a baby with her extremely rich fiancé whilst trying to balance her own family dramas, meeting his family and work. I think the Sandie/Toby angle (I was kinda in love with Toby, sue me) was what saved this book from being completely forgettable just because I'm kinda a sucker for opposites and all the crap associated with it and I didn't even mind that his mother was painted as a draconian cartoon villain with borderline racist tendencies.

The book wasn't great, but it wasn't bad either. It was what it was designed to be, an easy to read piece of fun. I might actually get round to reading the other two books in the series at one point because as far as the genre goes, I have definitely read worse.

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**chippyvale says**

the first few chapters were decent but subsequently it went downhill. Three Bs- bland, boring, banal. the only reason why I persevered til the last page is because I do not have the habit of reading books half-way.

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